

# *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*

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## Editorial

### Checklists

Checklists are valuable, but sometimes they are unnecessary. Almost all areas have crows and mynas so is there any point in cluttering the list with these names ? Sometimes this may be important, for even the house sparrow is disappearing from places where it is taken for granted. Hence the writer must choose which birds need to be included to give a picture of the bird life of the area.

But it is important to follow a standard pattern, so that lists from different areas can be easily compared. Follow the sequence adopted by Sibley and Monroe. The Nomenclature of the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent by Aasheesh Pittie and Andrew Robertson is a useful publication which must be kept on hand. Copies can be had from Navbharath Enterprises, Seshadripuram, Bangalore 20. If for any reason you wish to follow the sequence in the Handbook, please say so.

After the 1992 International Ornithological Congress not only has the old (Handbook) sequence been changed, but some Genera and Species have been transferred from one Family to another. The Synopsis and the Handbook commence with the *Gaviidae* (divers and loons) and ends with the *Emberizidae*, a total of 77 Families. The "new" nomenclature starts with the megapodes and ends with the *Fringillidae*, a total of 78. Ripley's *Emberizidae* has been eliminated and the buntings under that heading have been transferred to the new Family *Fringillidae*. Also there has been much shifting of species from one Family to another. Under *Corvidae*, Ripley included jays, magpies and crows, while Sibley and Monroe include crows, orioles, drongos, and ioras. Ripley had separate Families for Orioles (*Oriolidae*) and drongos (*Dicruriidae*). Both these families have been eliminated.

In the Birds of Palakkad Hills in this issue, the author has listed 237 species from 52 Families. For lack of space the full list cannot be reproduced, but I am sure the author will be glad to supply the list to anyone who asks for it. But to indicate the richness of the area which the author emphasises, the species belonging to the birds of prey and water fowl are included. The presence of so many birds of prey indicates that a large number of smaller birds exist, on which the predators feed.



With regard to the article about species present in the Rubber Estate, the full list is reproduced as it is surprising to see the number present in a monoculture of exotic trees.

The species list of Birds in Valley School is very impressive. Look at the number of owls, for example, in this area. So is the case with several other groups such as warblers. I would like to make a request to contributors who send checklists. Please be prepared to send your checklists to anyone who asks for them. For lack of space the complete list may not be included in future Newsletters. I will have to work on the principle that half a loaf of bread (or a few scraps) is better than none, provided that you know where the rest is available.

Finally, Krys Kazmierczak says that the list submitted by him about the birds of Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary "includes a number of species apparently not previously recorded." I am sending the full list to people who are possibly familiar with, and interested in, the birds of the region - S. Datta, D. Barooah and others.

### Are Warblers less important than tigers?

Some of you must have read the fascinating article by Madhusudan Katti on this subject, published in Bird Link Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1997. It is a remarkable example of sustained and detailed study bringing to light the contribution of members of the genus *Phylloscopus* in preserving our natural environment. "All 18 species of leaf warblers occurring in the Indian sub-continent are migratory. They number in the billions and form probably the most abundant avian guild in the sub-continental forests during our sub-tropical winter". The author points out that since each warbler on an average eats 3 insects every waking minute, i.e., 180 insects every hour, one can imagine what the state of the environment would have been if the insects had been permitted to proliferate unchecked.

So it is not the most glamorous and most visible of birds which are the most important from the ecological point of view.

The role of these birds, in maintaining the greenery of our country cannot be over-emphasised.

### Cuckoos and Ethology

Raghavendra Gadagkar, Chairman CES:IISc., has drawn attention to some fascinating aspects of bird life in *Resonance* May 97. It seems that over 80 species of Cuckoos, 1% of bird species, are known to be brood parasites. All of them have established strategies to ensure that the host does not discover that they have been duped. One way of doing so is for the eggs of the parasite to match as closely as possible the size and colour of those belonging to the host. This is where evolution comes into play and the cuckoo is in no position to consciously change the colour pattern of its eggs.

But cuckoos can take some action on their own to ensure that the host does not eject their eggs from the nest. When for example, a magpie is parasitised upon by a cuckoo, it has three options. "It can rear both magpie and cuckoo chicks; eject the cuckoo eggs and rear only its own offspring; or abandon the nest and start all over again. Research has proved that when magpies eject cuckoo eggs, 86% of the nests were attacked by cuckoos; But when they accepted the cuckoo eggs, only 12% of the nests were attacked"

Gadagkar complains about the minimum work done in India on ethology, though it should be "an obvious choice for Indian biologists embarking on a research career". He goes on to explain Ethology is rooted in **observation** of animal behaviour, an activity that only simpletons think simple.. observation is a difficult and sophisticated process calling upon all the intellectual virtues, attention, patience, heightened awareness, caution in coming to conclusions, courage in framing expectations". Perhaps some of our birdwatchers, will take up the fascinating study of the relationship between crows and koels. Does the crow ever attempt to eject the koels eggs? How and when does the koel place its egg in the crow's nest. Is it true that the male koel helps the female to approach the crow's nest by diverting the crow's attention away from its nest? Let observation come into play.



Lush green and overlooking the Palakkad gap (formerly "Palghat" gap) at its northern side lie the hills of Palakkad. This once placid group of hills is now part of the forest division of Palakkad with two ranges, Olavakkod and Walayar. It is located between 10° 49' and 10° 58' N latitudes and 76° 37' to 76° 53' E longitudes spanning an area of 173 sq. km. This area is bounded by Mannarghat and Kalladikode hills in the North, contiguous hills of Tamil Nadu in the East and North east and the 32.2 km gap in the South. The altitudinal gradient

## Birds of Palakkad Hills

PRAVEEN J \* MANEESH KUMAR \* and SANJU VARGHESE GEORGE \*\*  
XIV/779 (2) "Ambadi" K. Medu P.O. Pallakad 678 103, Kerala,  
\*\* C-9, MCL Township, Walayar, Palakkad Dt, Kerala

ranges from 100 m. to 1996 m. above MSL, the latter being the height of the Karimala peak. The climate is hot and humid, and the mean daily temperature ranges from 37° C to 24° C. The annual rainfall is about 215 cms, 70% of the precipitation concentrating in the four pluvial months of the monsoon. Vegetation is mainly dry and moist deciduous, together with tropical semi-evergreen. A 2.59 sq. km Walayar reservoir lies at its eastern end while a much bigger 22.01 sq. km Malampuzha reservoir nestles at its centre. Thus these varied



ecosystems harbour a diverse avifauna and the checklist has over 200 species.

General bird activity in the reservoir commences with the break of the monsoon. The lakes are flooded from the catchment areas covering all the meadows. Large cormorants and spotbill ducks could be seen in both lakes, the latter being present through out the year. Some thirty darters have invariably made Malampuzha their abode. Large quantities of water drained off for irrigation after the monsoon uncover mudflats attracting migratory ducks and waders. These virtually inaccessible swamps brim with huge congregations of stints, shanks, sandpipers, plovers and pratincoles. A sudden release of the shutters at Walayar dam allure large flocks of whiskered terns if the let off coincides with their movements, while a few river terns fly about the lakes during winter. The eastern fringes of Malampuzha reservoir are dotted with some thousand odd pintails through out the winter. A solitary osprey winters regularly at Malampuzha while a peregrine falcon on passage was spotted on 14-10-95 at Walayar and so was a vagrant reef heron on 11-1-94, and two ruffs on 26.1.97

One fascinating spectacle, quite rare in Kerala, is the wintering congregation of storks. While the whitenecked storks and openbills are seen in both the reservoirs, the rest have a strong affinity with Walayar. An abrupt discharge of water during the dry season had enticed some 150 openbills and sixty plus painted storks to have a feast on the exposed fish which failed to keep pace with the receding water. A moderately large flock of black storks regularly winter here some of them straggling to Malampuzha, while a single white stork was observed during the 1995-1996 winter. This extraordinary congregation of storks at Walayar might be due to the proximity to the Deccan Plateau and its location at the northern tip of Palakkad gap.

A unique ecosystem, exceptional to Kerala in many respects is the vestigial patch of scrubland unveiled by the retreating waters of Walayar reservoir. This ecosystem has been the haunt of many species comparatively rare in the state. Early morning or late hour visits are rewarded with the melodious trills of wren warblers accompanying beves of whitethroated babblers or some cheeing yelloweyed babblers. Grey partridges give themselves away by calling lustily "pteela- pteela" while on lucky days some three toed or four toed quails could be spotted. It was during such days (from 16-7-94) with the monsoon still feeble that a male painted spurfowl showed up on three consecutive evenings. The only previous record in the state was by A.O. Hume possibly from the same area (Walliyar jungles as he had stated). But this seasonal ecosystem is rapidly engulfed by the waters as the rains lash out and the birds nimbly move out to neighbouring Tamil Nadu. Many other dryland species like baybacked shrike, desert wheatear and whitethroated munia have been recorded in similar ecosystems.

The forests on the periphery of the Walayar reservoir, including the teak plantations are highly degraded due to heavy human interference. A similar forest lies on the

southwestern margin of Malampuzha reservoir. Many open woodland species uncommon in the rest of Kerala are found here. The fluty calls of the Ceylon green barbet or a bewildering assemblage of whitebellied, grey and racket tailed drongos, chloropsis, grey tits, ioras, small minivets, pigmy and Malabar woodpeckers, wood and cuckoo shrikes welcome a lucky birder. A fleeting glimpse of the elusive greenbilled malabar or a frolicking paradise flycatcher with its flowing white ribbon tail are a common sight. A blackbacked woodpecker could be expected clambering on a tree on rare occasions. The nights are made memorable by the booming hoots of the horned owl and the tuttering murmurs of common nighjars.

On climbing the hills, the degraded woodlands give way to moist deciduous forests and remnant patches of tropical semi-evergreen vegetation. This is the largest and the most prominent biotope of this region, extending from Dhoni and adjoining hills in the west, to the jungles of Walayar in the east. They form the perennial water source of the two reservoirs. Here the mixed hunting party composition changes radically with the ubiquitous yellowbrowed bulbuls and fairy bluebirds calling joyously. White eyes, nuthatches, quaker babblers, rubythroated and red whiskered bulbuls escort them in hunting flocks. The long drawn whistles of grackles, the hysterical laughs of malabar grey hornbills and the harsh chatters of southern treepie enliven these forests. Woodpeckers are plentiful, a pair of heart spotted woodpecker here, or a diminutive piculet there, are often seen. Wintering flycatchers execute graceful sallies amidst the canopy while the glamorous bluechat rummages through less frequented paths. One might see a black eagle gliding majestically over grasslands on the steeper slopes or a rufousbellied eagle perching bolt upright scrutinizing the landscape below. The distant booping of the imperial pigeon, the harsh cheeps of the spiderhunters and the liquid melodies of whistling thrushes are all part of the sylvan dialect. This is a veritable haven for several endemic rarities including the Ceylon frogmouth. Other less-met-with ones like the great pied hornbill, bluebearded bee-eater and haircrested drongo have been seen. A threetoed kingfisher was seen near one of the trickling rivulets of Dhoni foothills.

All might seem safe and sound but these habitats teeming with avifauna have many threats to their existence. The presence of Malabar Cements (MCL) factory in the fragile environment of Walayar has led to devastating effects. A lion's share of its toxic wastes finds a way into the reservoir, while dust and noxious effluents have made the adjacent hills devoid of any vegetation. Even the teak plantations where the MCL housing colony is nestled has been imperiled due to the excessive use of insecticides to check the mosquito menace. Moreover the limestone mines of this factory are situated right in the heart of the pristine semi-evergreen tracts and a well maintained road with 24 hour traffic runs through the jungles for a distance of 10 km. All the solid wastes from the limestone mines are washed off into the Malampuzha reservoir.

Another major problem which has been the cause for the sad plight of these hills, is the encroachments and the disturbances created by the vast human population inhabiting



the foothills. Though the tribal population is also to blame, it is the settlers, possessing rubber estates who exert heavy biotic pressure. The forest cover on paper might be intact but the health and quality of the biosphere is destroyed. Poor maintenance of these forests has been the cause for the forest fires devouring a lot of under growth during summer months. A recent felling of trees by the forest department in the Dhoni foothills has forced the birds there to move out to safer habitats, not to speak of the illegal felling in all areas contiguous with Malampuzha. A busy NH 47 and broadgauge railway lines passing through the edges of these forests add to the vexation. This eco-rich area of Palakkad hills will be doomed if the pollution and habitat destruction continue at this alarming rate. It is high time that conservationists, and NGOs rally forward for its protection.

The present work has been the result of some serious birding on our part for the past six years. The text and checklists have been compiled after omitting the doubtful sightings which include several raptors, waders and warblers.

### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Mr L Namassivayan and Mr Abdul Bashir for going through the text critically and commenting on the subject. Hearty thanks to our friends Ranju, Manoj, Ajith, Sathish and Goutham who accompanied us on several field trips.

### Checklist of Birds of Palakkad Hills [Of the 237 species from 52 families only the birds of prey and waterfowl are published - Editor]

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
<b>Family : Anatidae</b>		
1	Lesser whistling teal	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
2	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
3	Spotbill duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
4	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
5	Cotton teal	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>
<b>Family : Accipitridae</b>		
6	Blackwinged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
7	Crested honey buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
8	Pariah kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
9	Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
10	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
11	Besra sparrow-hawk	<i>Accipiter virgatus</i>
12	Crested hawk-eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatu</i>
13	Booted eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>
14	Rufousbellied eagle	<i>Hieraaetus kienerii</i>
15	Black eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malayensis</i>
16	Pale harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>
17	Montagu's harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
18	Marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
19	Crested serpent eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>



20 Osprey

### Family : Falconidae

21 Shahin falcon

22 Peregrine falcon

23 Kestrel

*Pandion haliaetus*

*Falco peregrinator*

*Falco japonensis*

*Falco tinnunculus*



Apart from the birds in the Checklist, some doubtful records are also mentioned here, so that it might aid future studies.

There is a still unconfirmed record of Indian courser (*Cursorius coromandelicus*) on 8.1.94 in the meadows of Walayar, A blackeared kite (*Milvus lineatus*) was spotted on 14.1.95 in the same place. There has been a couple of sightings of the great black woodpecker (*Dryocopus javensis*) from the Walayar jungles, but considering the status of this bird, we resolved to include it only after getting more evidence of its existence. Also, there have been some doubtful reports of the presence of broad billed rollers (*Eurystomus orientalis*) in the Walayar semi-evergreens, and of greyheaded bulbuls (*Pycnonotus priocephalus*) in Kawa and Dhoni hills. A wiretailed swallow (*Hirundo smithii*) with tail streamers was spotted once in Walayar reservoir but the nonexistence of records from Central and South Kerala deters us from including it in this checklist. And finally to indicate the extent of vagrancy, a Frigate bird was observed by one of us (SVE) on 18.7.94, with its white breast extending as an inverted 'V' on the flanks. Though this could well have been a female *Fregata minor*, we hesitate to include it.

### Scope for future studies

It is saddening to note that there have been no long term ecological studies in the Palakkad hills. Because of the Palghat gap it is a significant area. So is the case with Nelliampathies at the southern tip; though at present in an ecologically pathetic state, there is ample scope for serious studies.

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# Checklist of Birds in A Rubber Estate in Kerala

SUBIN G. NAIR, Sreevallabha vilasom, Thampalakkad, P.O. Ponkunnam, Kottayam Dt., Kerala

While browsing through the past issues of the NLBW, I was surprised to see an article on the birds of rubber plantations by Mr Ittiyavira Abraham (Vol. 32, No. 9-10). Though it was a fascinating piece, the absence of a checklist prompted me to list the species based on my observations during the past four years.

My field area, Thampalakkad (76° 32' E, 9° 36' N) is a small village situated about 40 kms from Kottayam town in Kerala. This village and its environs have the credit of being the first place selected for planting rubber in India. Nestling in the foothills of Cardamom Hills, the terrain is undulating and bio-geographically best suited for rubber cultivation. Hence during the past fifty years most of this area has been converted into rubber plantations. Other fairly dominant tree species include Mahogany (*Sweitenia mahagoni*), Anjili (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*), Coconut tree (*Cocos nucifera*), Teak (*Tectona grandis*) etc. The region receives rain from the South West and the North East monsoon as well as from pre-monsoon showers.

Bird diversity seems to have narrowed and now insectivorous species dominate the area. As we walk through the estates the shrill metallic song of Tickell's blue flycatcher (*Muscicapa tickelliae*) and the resonant calls of racket-tailed drongos (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) reach our ears. The mixed hunting troops usually have birds like grey tits, chloropsis, minivets, cuckoo shrikes, sunbirds, yellowbrowed bulbuls and woodpeckers. Jungle owlet (*Glaucidium radiatum*) seems to be very common here due to the abundance of insect food. Spiderhunters (*Arachnothera longirostris*) were recently spotted here and since then have been seen occasionally.

Once upon a time, all the hills were covered with beautiful forests. With the advent of rubber, vast tracts have been cleared and monoculture practised. Even the few remaining patches are getting converted into plantations leading to severe ecological problems. The recent drinking water shortage due to drying of wells during summer is one such. Regarding birdlife, many forest dwelling species have become locally extinct while the ones that have adapted to the change are increasingly becoming rubber dependent. The main aim of the note is to point out the ill-effects of monoculture practices on birdlife and its consequent influence on ecology.

Personally I have not found the rubber estates as invigorating as Mr Abraham has described in his lengthy script.

The checklist based on my frequent observations is given here following the order of the "Checklist of Kerala birds" given in the third edition of "Keralathile Pakshikal" by Prof. K.K. Neelakantan.

## CHECKLIST

### Family : Picidae

- |   |                                |                             |     |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|
| 1 | Pigmy woodpecker               | <i>Dendrocopos nanus</i>    | (F) |
| 2 | Lesser goldenbacked woodpecker | <i>Dinopium benghalense</i> | (C) |
| 3 | Heartspotted woodpecker        | <i>Hemicircus canente</i>   | (R) |

### Family : Megalaimidae

- |   |                    |                          |     |
|---|--------------------|--------------------------|-----|
| 4 | Small green barbet | <i>Megalaima viridis</i> | (C) |
|---|--------------------|--------------------------|-----|

### Family : Upupidae

- |   |        |                    |     |
|---|--------|--------------------|-----|
| 5 | Hoopoe | <i>Upupa epops</i> | (R) |
|---|--------|--------------------|-----|

### Family : Coraciidae

- |   |               |                              |     |
|---|---------------|------------------------------|-----|
| 6 | Indian roller | <i>Coracias benghalensis</i> | (R) |
|---|---------------|------------------------------|-----|

### Family : Alcedinidae

- |   |                   |                      |     |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|-----|
| 7 | Common kingfisher | <i>Alcedo atthis</i> | (R) |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|-----|

### Family : Dacelonidae

- |   |                          |                             |     |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|
| 8 | Storkbilled kingfisher   | <i>Pelargopsis capensis</i> | (R) |
| 9 | Whitebreasted kingfisher | <i>Halcyon smymensis</i>    | (F) |

### Family : Cerylidae

- |    |                            |                     |     |
|----|----------------------------|---------------------|-----|
| 10 | Travancore pied kingfisher | <i>Ceryle rudis</i> | (R) |
|----|----------------------------|---------------------|-----|

### Family : Meropidae

- |    |                           |                            |     |
|----|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----|
| 11 | Green bee eater           | <i>Merops orientalis</i>   | (F) |
| 12 | Chestnut headed bee eater | <i>Merops leschenaulti</i> | (R) |

### Family : Cuculidae

- |    |                    |                            |      |
|----|--------------------|----------------------------|------|
| 13 | Common hawk cuckoo | <i>Cuculus varius</i>      | (C)  |
| 14 | Indian cuckoo      | <i>Cuculus micropterus</i> | (RM) |
| 15 | Koel               | <i>Centropus sinensis</i>  | (F)  |

### Family : Centropodidae

- |    |               |                           |     |
|----|---------------|---------------------------|-----|
| 16 | Crow pheasant | <i>Centropus sinensis</i> | (F) |
|----|---------------|---------------------------|-----|

### Family : Psittacidae

- |    |                        |                                |     |
|----|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----|
| 17 | Indian lorikeet        | <i>Loriculus vernalis</i>      | (F) |
| 18 | Roseringed parakeet    | <i>Psittacula krameri</i>      | (F) |
| 19 | Blossomheaded parakeet | <i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i> | (O) |

### Family : Apodidae

- |    |                                    |                              |     |
|----|------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----|
| 20 | Indian ediblenest swiftlet         | <i>Collocalia unicolor</i>   | (F) |
| 21 | Large brownthroated spintail swift | <i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>  | (R) |
| 22 | Palm swift                         | <i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i> | (F) |
| 23 | House swift                        | <i>Apus affinis</i>          | (R) |

### Family : Strigidae

- |    |                    |                            |     |
|----|--------------------|----------------------------|-----|
| 24 | Jungle owlet       | <i>Glaucidium radiatum</i> | (C) |
| 25 | Collared scops owl | <i>Otus bakkamoena</i>     | (R) |

### Family : Columbidae

- |    |                 |                               |     |
|----|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----|
| 26 | Bluerock pigeon | <i>Columba livia</i>          | (C) |
| 27 | Spotted dove    | <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i> | (R) |
| 28 | Emerald dove    | <i>Chalcophaps indica</i>     | (R) |

### Family : Rallidae

- |    |                        |                              |     |
|----|------------------------|------------------------------|-----|
| 29 | Whitebreasted waterhen | <i>Amauornis phoenicurus</i> | (F) |
|----|------------------------|------------------------------|-----|



**Family : Accipitridae**

- 30 Brahminy kite *Haliastur indus* (R)  
 31 Crested serpent eagle *Spilornis cheela* (F)  
 32 Shikra *Accipiter badius* (F)  
 33 Crested hawk eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus* (R)

**Family : Falconidae**

- 34 Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (MR?)

**Family : Phalacrocoracidae**

- 35 Little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* (R)

**Family : Ardeidae**

- 36 Little egret *Egretta garzetta* (R)  
 37 Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis* (F)  
 38 Pond heron *Ardeola grayii* (F)

**Family : Pittidae**

- 40 Indian pitta *Pitta brachyura* (FM)

**Family : Irenidae**

- 41 Fairy bluebird *Irena puella* (R)  
 42 Jerdon's chloropsis *Chloropsis cochinchinensis* (C)  
 43 Goldfronted chloropsis *Chloropsis aurifrons* (F)

**Family : Corvidae**

- 44 Indian treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* (C)  
 45 House crow *Corvus splendens* (C)  
 46 Jungle crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* (C)  
 47 Ashy swallow shrike *Artamus fuscus* (C)  
 48 Golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus* (FM)  
 49 Blackheaded oriole *Oriolus xanthornus* (C)  
 50 Large cuckoo shrike *Coracina macei* (C)  
 51 Small minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus* (C)  
 52 Scarlet minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus* (C)  
 53 Black drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* (F)  
 54 Grey drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* (F)  
 55 Bronzed drongo *Dicrurus aeneus* (F)  
 56 Greater rackettailed drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus* (C)  
 57 Paradise flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* (FM)  
 58 Common iora *Aegithina tiphia* (C)

**Family : Muscicapidae**

- 59 Malabar whistling thrush *Myiophonus horsfieldii* (R)

- 60 Brown flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* (RM)

- 61 Tickell's blue flycatcher *Muscicapa tickelliae* (C)

- 62 Magpie robin *Copsychus saularis* (C)

**Family : Sturnidae**

- 63 Blyth's myna *Sturnus malabaricus* (R)

- 64 Common myna *Acridotheres tristis* (C)

- 65 Jungle myna *Acridotheres fuscus* (F)

**Family : Sittidae**

- 66 Velvetfronted nuthatch *Sitta frontalis* (R)

**Family : Paridae**

- 67 Grey tit *Parus major* (C)

**Family : Pycnonotidae**

- 68 Redwhiskered bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* (F)

- 69 Yellowbrowed bulbul *Iole indica* (C)

**Family : Sylviidae**

- 71 Blyth's reed warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (RM)

- 72 Tailor bird *Orthotomus sutorius* (C)

- 73 Greenish leaf warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* (CM)

- 74 Jungle babbler *Turdoides striatus* (C)

**Family : Nectariniidae**

- 75 Tickell's flowerpecker *Dicaem erythrorhynchos* (C)

- 76 Nilgiri flowerpecker *Dicaem concolor* (F)

- 77 Purplerumped sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* (C)

- 78 Loten's sunbird *Nectarinia lotenia* (C)

- 79 Little spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostris* (F)

**Family : Passeridae**

- 80 House sparrow *Passer domesticus* (R)

- 81 Large pied wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis* (R)

- 82 Grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (FM)

- 83 Whitebacked munia *Lonchura striata* (F)

**STATUS**

C - Common

F - Fairly Common

R - Rare

M - Migrant

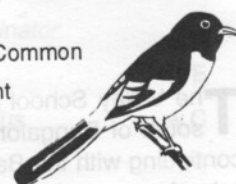
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Neelakantan K.K; Keralithile Pakshikal (Malayalam)





## Birds in Horsley Hills

MANU PRASANNA, K.M. BELLIAPPA and B.S. VITTAL, No. 5, 3rd Cross, Nehru Nagar, Bangalore 560 020

We made two sorties to Horsley Hills in Andhra Pradesh during 1996-97. We visited the hills once between 21-22 May 1996 and again between 26-28 July 1997. During the course of our two visits we made the following significant observations:

Yellowthroated Bulbuls *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* were in pairs near the hill top on 21-22 May 96. They were a common sight particularly on the fruiting *Ficus microcarpa*. We noted that the call of the yellowthroated bulbul is somewhat similar to that of the whitebrowed bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus*, however being softer, less "explosive" and uttered for a shorter duration of time. We also observed them feeding on the ground. During 26-28 July 97 we encountered yellowthroated bulbuls only in the foothills country and none near the hill top. Contrary to the observation of Subramanya and Prasad (1992), during our visits we noted that redwhiskered bulbuls *Pycnonotus jocosus* are commoner than yellowthroated bulbuls and infact the former maybe the commonest bird on the hill.

We came across a few jungle crows *Corvus macrorhynchos* near the zoo at the top of the hill. Previously crows were absent on the hill (Subramanya and Prasad 1992). The strong breeze that blows here throughout the day was probably one of the reasons why no crows came but with picnickers generating increasing amounts of garbage the arrival of crows was inevitable. However the absence of mynas and sparrows is still conspicuous.

On 28th July we saw an active nest of a shama *Copsychus malabaricus*. The nest was placed in a natural cavity of a tree

at a height of 4 feet. Subsequently we stumbled upon another active nest and a few more similar old nests in the area. Soon after our sighting the breeding pair of shamas, Shri Venkataswamappa and R.S. Suresh, both bird photographers, rushed on 30/31st July 97 to Horsley and were able to take photographs of both the male and female birds visiting the nest with feed for the chicks. The logistic support and encouragement extended by the Management of Rishi Valley School, specially Mr. S. Rangaswami and Mr. S. Sridhar deserve special mention. We hope NLBW will carry these pictures in some future issue.

### Additions to Horsley Hills Checklist

- |                        |                              |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 01. Scavenger vulture  | <i>Neophron percnopterus</i> |
| 02. Crested hawk eagle | <i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>   |
| 03. Painted spurfowl   | <i>Galloperdix lunulata</i>  |
| 04. Jungle bush quail  | <i>Perdica asiatica</i>      |
| 05. Ringed dove        | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> |
| 06. Redrumped swallow  | <i>Hirundo daurica</i>       |
| 07. Spotted munia      | <i>Lonchura punctulata</i>   |
| 08. Blackheaded oriole | <i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>    |
| 09. Jungle crow        | <i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>  |



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## Birds in Valley School and its Surrounds

MANU PRASANNA, SANDILYA T., K.M. BELLIAPPA, VIVEK NITHYANANDA, S. SIDDHARTH, ROHIT GULATI, ROBERT BAGCHI and B.S. VITTAL

The Valley School (Krishnamurti Foundation India), "Haridvanam", 17th Kmeter, Kanakapura Road, Thatguni Post, Bangalore 560 062

The Valley School (12° 51'N, 77° 30'E) is situated 17km. south of Bangalore city. It is a 100 acre patch of forest continuing with the Badavanamarthi State Forest. When the school was established in 1978 part of the area was covered by the remnants of a natural forest and the rest, barren land. On the whole the area can be divided into four distinct habitats.

The eastern end of the campus forms a scrub and grassland habitat. The dominant plant species found in this region are trees such as *Morinda tinctoria*, *Albizia amara*, shrubs like *Clerodendrum serretum*, *Lantana camera*, *Calotropis gigantea*, *Kirgenellia reticulata* and *Fluggea virosa* along with grasses *Chloris barbata*, *Themeda octovalvis* and

*Aristida setosa*. Birds regularly seen in this habitat are grey partridge, Indian nightjar, baybacked shrike, yellow-wattled lapwing, large grey babbler, great horned owl, pied bushchat and singing bushlark.

Over the years the planting of trees such as *Ficus religiosa*, *Tamarindus indica*, *Milletia ovalifolia*, *Delonix regia*, *Peltophorum pterocarpum*, *Mangifera indica*, *Pongamia pinnata* has turned the other end of the campus into a densely wooded region. *Ficus benghalensis*, *Zizyphus oenopia*, *Syzygium operculatum*, *Toddalia asiatica*, *Canthium parviflorum*, *Coculus hirsuts*, *Crotalaria* sp., *Argyreia cuneata* are also found in this region. Birds uncommonly seen around



Bangalore such as blue chat, blackbird, chestnut-headed bee-eater, grey hornbill and brown hawk-owl were all spotted in this region.

The Badavanamathi State Forest adjoining the school forms an altogether different habitat. It is a Eucalyptus plantation with a thick growth of lantana which makes it tough to penetrate. Plant species such as *Acacia leucophloea*, *Santalum album*, *Feronia elephantum*, *Psidium guajava*, *Erythroxylem monogynum*, *Cippadessa baccifera*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Cocculus hirsutus* also thrive here. Owing to the low human disturbance roosts of bee-eaters and nests of sirkeer cuckoo, small greenbilled malkhoa, ringed dove and short-toed eagle have been seen here. Two irrigation tanks go to form the wetland habitat in the area.

The total extermination of the local peafowl population due to hunting, decrease in scrubland birds and the recent arrival of species like blue chat and common grey hornbill are among the more noticeable changes in the birdlife in the region in the past few years.

The following list is based on the observations made here from 1990-1997. The members of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of Bangalore have also been organising field trips in the school for a decade now. Many of their sightings have also been included.

### Checklist of the Birds

#### Family : Podicipedidae

Little grebe *Podiceps ruficollis* rb B

#### Family : Phalacrocoracidae

Little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* r C

#### Family : Ardeidae

Grey heron *Ardea cinerea* r C

Purple heron *Ardea purpurea* r C

Pond heron *Ardeola grayii* r B

Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis* r B

Large egret *Ardea alba* v 1

Little egret *Egretta garzetta* r B

Smaller egret *Egretta intermedia* r D

Night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* r C

Chestnut bittern *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus* v 3

#### Family : Ciconiidae

Painted stork *Mycteria leucocephala* r E

Openbill stork *Anastomus oscitans* v 1

White stork *Ciconia ciconia* v 1

#### Family : Threskiornithidae

Black ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* v 1

#### Family : Anatidae

Bar-headed goose *Anser indicus* v 1

Lesser whistling teal *Dendrocygna javanica* s C

Pintail *Anas acuta* w B

Common teal *Anas crecca* w D

Spotbilled duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* r B

Garganey *Anas querquedula* w B

Shoveller *Anas clypeata* v 2

Cotton teal *Nettapus coromandelianus* w E

#### Family : Accipitridae

Blackwinged kite *Elanus caeruleus* r B

Honey buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* r B

Pariah kite *Milvus migrans govinda* rb B

Black-eared kite *Milvus migrans lineatus* w D

Brahminy kite *Haliastur indus* rb B

Shikra *Accipiter badius* rb B

White-eyed buzzard-eagle *Butastur teesa* r C

Crested hawk eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus* r D

Booted hawk eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* w C

Tawny eagle *Aquila rapax vindhiana* r C

Black eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* r C

Indian longbilled vulture *Gyps indicus* r D

Indian whitebacked vulture *Gyps bengalensis* r B

Scavenger vulture *Neophron percnopterus* r C

Pale harrier *Circus macrourus* w E

Montagu's harrier *Circus pygargus* w D

Pied harrier *Circus melanoleucos* \*\*\*

Marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus* w C

Crested serpent eagle *Spilornis cheela* r D

Short-toed eagle *Circus gallicus* rb C

#### Family : Falconidae

Peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus japonensis* v 1

Shaheen falcon *Falco p. peregrinator* v 2

Red headed merlin *Falco chiquera* r E

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* w C

#### Family : Phasianidae

Grey partridge *Francolinus pondicerianus* rb B

Jungle bush quail *Perdica asiatica* rb C

Grey junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii* rb C

Common peafowl *Pavo cristatus* rb E

Rain quail *Coturnix coromandelica* \*\*\*

#### Family : Turnicidae

Common bustard-quail *Turnix suscitator* r D



**Family : Rallidae**

Ruddy crane	<i>Porzana fusca</i>	v 2
Whitebreasted waterhen	<i>Amauromis phoenicurus</i>	rb B
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	w E
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	rb C

**Family : Recurvirostridae**

Black-winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	w D
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**Family : Burhinidae**

Great stone plover	<i>Esacus magnirostris</i>	r C
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**Family : Glareolidae**

Small Indian pratincole	<i>Lactea glareola</i>	sb E
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**Family : Charadriidae**

Redwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	rb B
Yellow-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>	rb B
Little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	rb C
Kentish plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	w D
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	w D
Green sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	w B
Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	w D
Common sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>	w C
Fantail snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	v 2
Little stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	v 1

**Family : Laridae**

Whiskered tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	v 2
Indian river tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	rb C
Blackbellied tern	<i>Sterna acuticauda</i>	v 1

**Family : Columbidae**

Blue rock pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	v 1
Indian ring dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	rb B
Spotted dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	r B
Little brown dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	rb B

**Family Psittacidae**

Roseringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	rb B
Blossomheaded parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	r E

**Family Cuculidae**

Pied crested cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>	r C
Common hawk-cuckoo	<i>Cuculus varius</i>	r D
Indian cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	v 1
Indian plaintive cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>	r C
Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	r B
Small greenbilled malkoha	<i>Rhopodytes viridirostris</i>	rb C
Sirkeer cuckoo	<i>Taccocua leschenaultii</i>	rb E

Ceocal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	rb B
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**Family Strigidae**

Collard scops owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>	r D
Great Horned owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	rb C
Brown fish owl	<i>Bubo zeylonensis</i>	r D
Barred jungle owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>	—
Brown hawk owl	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>	v 1
Spotted owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>	rb B
Mottled wood owl	<i>Strix ocellata</i>	r C
Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	r D

**Family Caprimulgidae**

Indian jungle nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus indicus</i>	r D
Common Indian nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>	r B
Longtailed nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus macrurus</i>	rb C

**Family Apodidae**

Alpine swift	<i>Apus melba</i>	v 3
House swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	rb C
Palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>	r D
Crested tree swift	<i>Hemiprocne longipennis</i>	***

**Family Alcedinidae**

Lesser pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	rb C
Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	rb B
Whitebreasted kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smymensis</i>	rb B

**Family Meropidae**

Small green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	rb B
Chestnutheaded bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>	v 1

**Family Coraciidae**

Indian roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	r D
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**Family Upupidae**

Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	rb B
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**Family Bucerotidae**

Common grey hornbill	<i>Tockus birostris</i>	w E
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**Family Capitonidae**

Small green barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>	rb B
Crimsonbreasted barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	rb B

**Family Picidae**

Lesser goldenbacked woodpecker	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	rb B
Yellowfronted pied woodpecker	<i>Picoides mahrattensis</i>	v 1
Blackbacked woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>	r D
Scalybellied green woodpecker	<i>Picus squamatus</i>	***



Rufous woodpecker	<i>Micropternus brachyurus</i>	***
<b>Family Pittidae</b>		
Indian pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>	w C
<b>Family Alaudidae</b>		
Singing bush lark	<i>Mirafrja javanica</i>	r C
Ashycrowned finch lark	<i>Eremopterix grisea</i>	rb C
Rufoustailed finch lark	<i>Ammomanes phoenicurus</i>	r D
Skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>	r D
Rufouswinged bush lark	<i>Mirafrja assamica</i>	?
<b>Family Hirundinidae</b>		
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	w B
Wiretail swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	w D
Indian cliff swallow	<i>Hirundo fluvicola</i>	v1
Redrumped swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	rb B
<b>Family Laniidae</b>		
Baybacked shrike	<i>Lanius vittatus</i>	r B
Rufousbacked shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	r D
Brown shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	w B
<b>Family Oriolidae</b>		
Golden oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	w B
<b>Family Dicruridae</b>		
Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	rb C
Ashy drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	w B
Whitebellied drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>	r D
Haircrested drongo	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>	v1
<b>Family Artamidae</b>		
Ashy swallow shrike	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>	v1
<b>Family Sturnidae</b>		
Greyheaded myna	<i>Sturnus malabaricus</i>	v2
Brahminy myna	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>	r D
Rosy pastor	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>	w C
Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	rb C
Jungle myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>	rb B
<b>Family Corvidae</b>		
Indian tree pie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	rb B
House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	r C
Jungle crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	rb B
<b>Family Campephagidae</b>		
Common wood shrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>	r D
Large cuckoo shrike	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>	v3
Blackheaded cuckoo shrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>	r C
Small minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	r C



<b>Family Irenidae</b>		
Common iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	r B
Goldmantled chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>	r B
<b>Family Pycnonotidae</b>		
Redwhiskered bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	rb A
Redvented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	rb B
Whitebrowed bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>	rb B
<b>Family Muscicapidae</b>		
Spotted babbler	<i>Pellomeum ruficeps</i>	r C
Whitethroated babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>	rb B
Common babbler	<i>Turdoides caudatus</i>	r E
Large Grey babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>	r C
Whiteheaded babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>	r C
Yelloweyed babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>	rb C
Brown flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa latirostris</i>	w C
Redbreasted flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa parva</i>	w C
Tickell's Blue flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa tickelliae</i>	rb B
Verditer flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa thalassina</i>	w C
Nilgiri flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa albicaudata</i>	v1
Whitespotted fantail flycatcher	<i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>	r E
Whitebrowed fantail flycatcher	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	***
Paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	w B
Blacknaped flycatcher	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	w C
Whitebrowed blue flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa supercilialis</i>	***
Streaked fantail warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	r C
Franklin's wren warbler	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>	r C
Plain wren warbler	<i>Prinia subflava</i>	r B
Ashy wren warbler	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	rb B
Jungle wren warbler	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>	r D
Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	rb B
Indian great reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>	?
Blyth's reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	w C
Orphean warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>	w D
Lesser whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	w D
Large crowned leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus occipitalis</i>	v1
Dull green leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	w B
Blue chat	<i>Erithacus brunneus</i>	w D
Magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	rb B
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	w E
Stone chat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	r D

Pied bush chat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	r C
Indian robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>	rb B
Blueheaded rock thrush	<i>Monticola cinclorhynchus</i>	w D
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	w E
Whitethroated ground thrush	<i>Zoothera citrina</i>	***

**Family Paridae**

Grey tit	<i>Parus major</i>	rb B
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**Family Motacillidae**

Paddyfield pipit	<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>	w D
Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	w B
Forest wagtail	<i>Motacilla indica</i>	v1
White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	w E
Large pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	r B
Yellow wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	w C

**Family Dicaeidae**

Thickbilled flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>	r C
Tickell's flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>	r A

**Family Nectariniidae**

Purplerumped sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>	rb B
Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	rb C
Loten's sunbird	<i>Nectarinia lotenia</i>	rb C

**Family Zosteropidae**

White eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>	rb B
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**Family Pluceidae**

House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	rb C
Baya weaverbird	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	rb B
Streaked weaverbird	<i>Ploceus manyar</i>	rb B

Red munia	<i>Estrilda amandava</i>	rb D
Whitebacked munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>	r D
Spotted munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	rb B
Whitethroated munia	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>	rb C
Blackheaded munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>	rb C

**Family Fringillidae**

Common rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	v1
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**Status codes**

- r resident
- rb resident breeding
- sb summer breeding
- w winter migrant
- s summer migrant
- v vagrant (no. of sightings)
- ? identity uncertain
- A abundant
- B common
- C not so common
- D uncommon
- E rare
- \*\*\* not seen by us

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**E**rimalai is a small village in the Pennagaram Taluk of Dharmapuri district. It falls within the Palacode forest range. Situated at an altitude of between 700 and 800 m ASL is this village which has generally been cut off from the rest of Dharmapuri district thanks to poor communication facilities. The village is adjacent to the elephant ridden forests of Denkanikotta and has the repute of being frequented by some of our notorious sandalwood smugglers!

Erimalai is generally dry. The forests are dominated by thorns and low statured deciduous trees. The terrain is rocky.

## Birds of Erimalai

R.J. RANJIT DANIELS & M.V. RAVIKUMAR

M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, 3rd Cross Street, Taramani Institutional Area,  
Taramani, Chennai 600 113

Traditional forms of dryland agriculture is generally practised. Use of commercially available pesticide is scarce.

At our Foundation we chose this village to identify and train young people on the conservation of agrobiodiversity - traditional crops and cropping practices which while being adequately productive are 'ecofriendly'.

During our visits to Erimalai we came across a number of birds. Remarkable amongst these is the whitebellied treepie. This species considered endemic to the Western Ghats,



according to the Handbook has also been sighted in Bangalore and Palamaner in Andhra Pradesh in the past. Sighting this bird in Dharmapuri district (just south of Bangalore) is probably the most recent report outside its range, the Western Ghats.

The whitebellied treepie is easily the most handsome of Indian treepies. In the Western Ghats it ranges between Goa and Kanyakumari. It prefers dense evergreen forests up to an

can also be seen in deciduous and secondary moist forests. Occasionally the species enters human habitation in the hilly areas.

Other species of interest are the Alexandrine parakeet and sirkeer malkoha. The Alexandrine parakeet is currently locally extinct over many parts of its range in South India. There were reports of this species from parts of Kerala and northern Karnataka earlier than about 100 years ago. Recent sightings

S.NO	HANDBOOK NO	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
1	42	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
2	49	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
3	124	Blackwinged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
4	137	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
5	246	Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>
6	301	Grey Jungle fowl	<i>Gallus sonneratii</i>
7	537	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
8	541	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
9	545	Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
10	590	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopacea</i>
11	598	Sirkeer Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii</i>
12	602	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
13	652	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>
14	707	Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus batasiensis</i>
15	736	Whitethroated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
16	750	Little Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
17	756	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
18	781	Brownheaded Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
19	792	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
20	878	Ashycrowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix grisea</i>
21	916	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
22	940	Baybacked Shrike	<i>Lanius vittatus</i>
23	962	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
24	977	Great Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
25	1006	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
26	1031	Rufous Tree Pie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
27	1036	Whitebellied Tree Pie	<i>Dendrocitta leucogastra</i>
28	1049	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
29	1057	Largebilled Crow	<i>Corvus macrohynchos</i>
30	1100	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tithia</i>
31	1104	Goldfronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
32	1107	Bluewinged Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>

elevation of 1500 m ASL. Pairs or small flocks (family groups) of the parakeet from the Western Ghats are but a few. The

S.NO.	HANDBOOK NO.	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
33	1120	Redwhiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
34	1127	Redvented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
35	1138	Whitebrowed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
36	1262	Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>
37	1267	Yellow billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
38	1442	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
39	1460	Asian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
40	1503	Greybreasted Prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
41	1511	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
42	1517	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
43	1535	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
44	1556	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
45	1565	Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>
46	1602	Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
47	1700	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
48	1719	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>
49	1884	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla caspica</i>
50	1899	Palebilled Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
51	1907	Purplerumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
52	1917	Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>
53	1938	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
54	1957	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
55	1964	Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>
56	1966	Whitethroated Silverbill	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>
57	1974	Scalybreasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
58	1978	Blackheaded Munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>

of the parakeet from the Western Ghats are but a few. The sirkeer malkoha on the contrary is a fairly widespread species in India. Nevertheless the species being largely confined to dry deciduous forests and scrub, seems to be locally disappearing.

Erimalai is a remote and little explored area. There can be a lot of surprises in this area. Our present study is preliminary. Yet we wish to provide the full list of birds identified in the neighbourhood. The nomenclature is after Daniels (1997) *A fieldguide to the birds of Southwestern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.



## Kokrebellur Grey Pelicans - Extension of their Feeding and Breeding Grounds

S.G. NEGINHAL, Dip. Wildlife I.F.S. (Rtd.) AFIAP, 643, 9th Main, 2nd Cross, 3rd Stage, 3rd Block, Basaveshwaranagar, BANGALORE 560 079

**P**rior to 1976, there was no knowledge or report of the spotbilled or grey pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* breeding in Karnataka. It was then supposed that nowhere in India these birds bred except in Kaziranga (Assam), Aredu - Sarepalle (Andhra) and sporadically in Tirunelveli and Chingalpet districts of Tamilnadu.

When I landed at Mysore in 1972, as the Wildlife Officer, I had to manage the three famous sanctuaries viz. Bandipur, Nagarhole and Ranganathittu. My interest in wild animals and birds, however, drove me to fresh pastures of faunistic interest. But by no stretch of imagination could I have been made to look for grey pelicans, as these were not supposed to exist in Karnataka. Nor had Dr. Salim Ali come across this bird during his survey of birds of the then Mysore state in 1938-39. Under these circumstances my chance discovery of the Kokrebellur Pelicanry in April 1976 naturally made world news.

One day in early April 1976 while going to Bangalore I spotted a large congregation of painted storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) feeding at the road-side Rudraksipura water-tank, which led me to suspect that these birds should be breeding some-where nearby. But I had no time to investigate the surrounding areas to trace their breeding grounds. However, I decided to do so on my return journey the next day.

The next day I found no trace of these birds at Rudraksipura. Naturally I was disappointed, but doggedly set forth to trace the disappeared birds along a lone road to the left of the tank. After covering 15 kms, as I was just about giving up hope, Nature rewarded me, Lo! from a distance I saw a number of storks flying into and away from a sleepy silent village. I drove into the village to find hundreds of painted storks nesting on the trees literally in the court-yards of the villagers. The hamlet was resounding with the yelping and squealing of the young. The scene resembled a miniature Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary minus the water- sheet. I wondered how this place was not known to the outside (bird-watchers) world. As I went on observing the nesting storks from tree to tree, I observed a clumsy-looking, squat bird coming to its nest on a huge Banyan tree. It was incredible that this most unexpected bird could be breeding here. It was the endangered spotted-billed or grey pelican *Pelecanus*

*philippensis*. I had struck gold and had made a great ornithological discovery unknown to bird-watchers and ornithologists. To my delight many more grey pelicans were observed nesting on the big trees. The village road took me to an adjoining hamlet, Bannalli, where I also found a few grey pelicans nesting on two giant Banyan trees. (The birds have since deserted this hamlet!)

The announcement of this great discovery was flashed to the outside world through the news media, AIR, scientific journals etc.

Mr. T.C. Jerdon, author of *Birds of India*, 1864, has stated that he visited one Pelicanry in the "Carnatic", but he has not given details of the location of this pelicanry. The Carnatic region of those times included the geographical regions of parts of ex-Hyderabad State, now in Andhra etc. but not the Kokrebellur region, which was then known as Mysore State and not Carnatic. Did he come across the Aredu-Sarepalle pelicanry in Andhra Pradesh or some other pelicanry in the West Godavari District of Andhra State which was called as the Carnatic region in those times by the Britishers and not the "Kokrebellur" pelicanry - a part of the then Mysore State.

Soon people from Bangalore, Mysore and other cities started flocking to Kokrebellur. The birds, both painted storks and grey pelicans, were wary of city dwellers and showed signs of suspicion, distrust and alarm on seeing urban people in colourful dresses. They were used to 'Dhoti', 'Kurta' and 'Turban' clad innocent villagers. Even the villagers were unhappy with city people coming to see the birds. They loved and protected them and in return the villagers got the precious "guano" (an invaluable nitrogenous fertiliser).

The great inflow of urban dwellers and photographers to the village created disturbance. So I appointed one of the villagers as a paid watcher to control the human stream. In the next meeting of the Wildlife Board a proposal came up to take over Kokrebellur and to declare it as a Sanctuary. I resisted this move as it was already a "Sanctuary" protected by the villagers, who would have rebelled against the Government's interference. Instead I proposed to give some incentives to the owners of the nesting trees. Wisdom prevailed. The villagers



are getting annually Rs. 250/- to Rs. 1,000/- per nesting tree, which now needs to be enhanced to a reasonable level.

The grey pelicans, nesting, at a dry place like Kokrebellur, were observed going to the far off tanks of Tailur, Malavalli, Maddur etc. for feeding. They were also found feeding at Sulekere, Bolare Koppalu, Guntlukere and Marchalli etc. (Sridhar and Chakravarthy, N.L.B.W. Vol. 35, No. 2, 1995). The birds were further observed extending their jurisdiction to other far off tanks, wherever food (fish) and protection were available. I photographed a flotilla of grey pelicans hunting fish as far as the Dalawai kere near Mysore on the Bandipur road in 1992. In the same year (1992) they were also spotted coming to Karanji tank behind the Mysore Zoo both for feeding and sporadically nesting. Some pelicans were further seen nesting on trees skirting Kukkranalli tank in 1995, which is situated at the outskirts of Mysore City. Both these tanks are protected by the Zoo and Forest Departments. The pelicans later extended their feeding (fishing) grounds to Bilikere tank,

27 kms, away from Mysore on the Hunsur Road, in 1996 (Dr. Ms. M.V. Rama, N.L.B.W. Vol. 36, No. 6, 1996). When I was at Mysore from 1972-78 and in my regular sojourns at these localities, on the way to Bandipur, Nagarhole etc, for Wildlife studies, not a single Pelican was spotted, in the eighties, in these localities.

From the above facts it is seen that the Grey Pelicans discovered breeding at Kokrebellur in April 1976 had a limited distribution till 1991-1992. But over the years the Pelicans are spreading and extending their feeding jurisdiction to far off places like Mysore and Bilikere. Further, wherever protection and food (fish) are available, the Grey Pelicans are even breeding at the tanks around Mysore City at Karanji (1992) and Kukkranalli (1995). There is a possibility of these birds extending their biological activities to tanks situated in the drier areas of Kollegal and Chamarajanagar Districts, if proper protection is offered.



## Of Crows and Pigeons

Lt. Gen. BALJIT SINGH, "SAKHUA", P.O. Mc Cluskie Ganj, Dist. Ranchi, Bihar 829 208

I am not surprised that Zafar Futehally found "not a single individual of any other species" where house crows and blue-rock pigeons fed in numbers near India Gate, New Delhi, (NLBW, Vol. 37, No. 3, Page 35). I am a witness over the last three years to a form of apartheid inflicted by house crows on other avians which live and feed inside the two acre wilderness surrounding our cottage in an Adivasi Village.

In the natural way, when the sources of food are dispersed and so also birds of different species, there is perhaps no need for conflict over food among them. Take the wild-fig tree in fruit or the seemul tree in flower. I am sure all of us must have noticed so many birds of the same and different species feeding simultaneously on each such tree. No sooner the birds have had their fill, they fly away and a fresh lot of birds alights on the same tree. This goes on from dawn to dusk. There is seldom any conflict. But there does seem to exist an instinctive pecking order where the house crow is concerned. For, his arrival is noticed at once (of course on a much lower scale than that of a raptor) and most birds of other species usually move away to a different branch for feeding. That is all.

However, certain behavioural changes do occur when man takes to feeding free-ranging birds either out of compassion or on some religious injunction. The birds which appear to welcome this form of feeding environment and totally fearless of man's proximity in the process, are the house sparrow, house crow, blue-rock pigeon, common mynah and spotted dove (in Rajasthan, the peacock and parakeet also join in). Of all these species, whether by evolution or otherwise, the house crow is the most rapacious both for feeding himself and his fledglings. Even when the food is assured and plentiful (as in this case through man's largesse) the house crow is ever on

the look-out, has the first pick always and in full measure. Other species of birds which are drawn to the same feed seem to grant the top slot in the pecking order to the house crow and the rest of them feed at the periphery or wait for the crumbs as it were. In Rajasthan the peacock and parakeet take the first pick.

Having realised this inequity, my wife experimented by providing feed simultaneously at three places, 20 to 30 feet apart, hoping for dispersal of birds by species. It succeeded partially. Whichever spot the house crow (7 to 11) commandeered, the others keep clear of it. Though the pigeons form a large flock (8 to 13 blue-rock and 10 to 20 country cousins from adjoining villages) they are tolerant of others joining them at the feed. Of course it is a different matter that nothing can penetrate the dense mass of pigeons on the feed. So the house sparrow, spotted dove and mynah remain at the fringes of this tight congregation. If in the meantime, the house crows consume their feed, then move onto other feed spots and with aggressive cawing and hopping about they deftly scatter other birds away and consume the remaining feed. Infuriated by this piracy one tends to lunge at the house crows but in the process the others take to wing also; the ultimate in helplessness is when the cunning house crow soon reappear but others do not.

The house crow successfully terrorises the pets as well. My wife had to create an exclusive enclosure to feed her coop full of 31 domesticated pigeons. And we stand guard with catapult in hand when our gaggle of five white geese are taking their feed. Usually when a gander stretches his neck out and low over the ground and hisses like the cobra, all creatures

including man give a wide berth. But the house crow tamed and terrorised even the ganders.

Now, that is enough vilification of the house crow. They do have an interesting, aesthetic, mischievous and even lovable side to their personality as well. India's leading caricaturist R.K. Laxman had made a series of house crow pictures in India - in all manner of profiles because the bird simply fascinated him. These pictures were beautiful and if I remember right, they were exhibited by one of the leading art galleries of Bombay. The famous zoologist of our times, George Schaller had a crow (house?) as a pet who would accompany him outdoors perched on his shoulder, fly off into the sky as it caught his fancy but come rocketing down on a whistle from Schaller! Then there was a short story about a crow by Satyajit Ray which I heard from my wife. This crow was accompanying his master in a car. At a traffic red light halt, the bird noticed the man on the steering of an adjoining car remove his bi-focals and place them over the glove compartment, to wipe off sweat. In a flash the crow sneaked in, snatched the spectacles and vanished into the sky. Come the green traffic light but the man

at the steering was as helpless as a bat by day! And there you have the house crow as a classic bundle of mischief!

The blue-rock pigeons in contrast are thorough gentlemen. There is one amusing anecdote about them too. During the late Jawaharlal Nehru's time it so happened that there were more blue-rock pigeons roosting inside the Lok Sabha hall than there were MPs. At a point in time their combined cooing and its echo tended to drown the speeches of even the garrulous among MPs. I remember reading in one of the newspapers that on Mr Nehru's suggestion the BNHS or the late Salim Ali were asked to find humane ways to dislodge the pigeons from inside the hall. As I recall, the remedy suggested was to play a kind of music the sound frequency of which would drive the pigeons away or at least quieten them for the day. Those were the times when all living forms were respected and the notion of scientific culling was perhaps taboo.

I do not know if blue-rock pigeons still roost inside the Lok Sabha. Even if they do, they are unlikely to be under a fresh threat of eviction simply because no one gives a damn any more to any voice or noise other than his own!



## A Short Ornithological Survey of Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary

KRYS KAZMIERCZAK, 9 Norwich Road, Northwood, Middx, HA6 1ND, UK, and  
DESMOND ALLEN, 1158 No Ga Ya Cho, Machida-Shi, Tokyo 195-00, Japan

**D**uring the course of a six week trip to northeast India the authors had the opportunity of spending several days birdwatching at Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary in eastern Assam. A preliminary day trip was made to the central part of the Reserve in the Guijan Range on March 5. We stayed at Guijan itself and Kolomi Camp within the Reserve from March 7-11 exploring the wetlands, swamp forest and grassland in this area. On March 11 we moved to the Inspection Bungalow at Hathiguli at the eastern end of the Sanctuary and the following day explored the Surkey grassland. This, unfortunately, turned out to be heavily overgrazed by domestic cattle and thus unsuitable habitat for the endangered grassland species we were particularly interested in. March 13 was largely taken up with an attempt to reach another area of grassland at Amarpur to the northeast of the Sanctuary. We were foiled by the heavy rains which made the road impassable and spent a number of hours extricating vehicles that had gotten stuck in the mud.

The Sanctuary was set up to protect some 340 km<sup>2</sup> of the floodplain between the rivers Dibru and Brahmaputra. If one includes the adjoining section of the Brahmaputra within the protected area as proposed by the Forest Department the total area increases to 640 km<sup>2</sup>. It is thus hardly surprising that with a staff of just 25 forest guards the Sanctuary cannot be

adequately patrolled and there was much evidence of illegal logging. Dibru-Saikhowa is, however, still extremely rich in bird diversity and every effort should be made to ensure that its fragile ecosystem remains preserved for future generations of wildlife. During our stay we recorded 204 species of birds, a number of which were particularly noteworthy:

Falcated duck *Anas falcata* - Uncommon winter visitor to the subcontinent. One male was seen on the River Kolomi on March 5.

Pale-capped pigeon *Columba punicea* - A threatened resident species. One observed carrying a sprig, apparently as nesting material, near Tongkrong on March 8.

Black-breasted thrush *Turdus dissimilis* - An uncommon, near-threatened altitudinal migrant. One male was observed near Kolomi on March 10 and another at Bherjan Forest near Tinsukia the following day.

Jerdon's bushchat *Saxicola jerdoni* - A near-threatened resident species that is not often recorded. One male was seen moving through low bushes near Kolomi on March 9.

Marsh babbler *Pellorneum palustre* A threatened species for which there do not appear to be many published records in recent years. Two responded to 'pishing' in a patch of tall elephant grass near Kolomi on March 9.



Fire-breasted flowerpecker - *Dicaeum ignipectus* - One male in degraded forest near Surkey was at an altitude of about 100 m.A.S.L. on March 12. The Handbook only records this species as wintering down to 600 m.

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## Ecological Isolation in Doves *Streptopelia Spp.* in and around A.M.U. Campus, Aligarh

SHAHLA YASMIN, Mona Sales Corporation, Babunia Road, P.O. Siwan 841 226, N. Bihar  
(M. Phil. dissertation was submitted by Shahla Yasmin at Centre of Wildlife and Ornithology, A.M.U., Aligarh under the guidance of Dr. H.S.A. Yahya. Summary of the work (conducted during 1990) is presented here.)

**F**ive *Streptopelia* species are found in India, out of which four coexist in Aligarh. These are Indian ring dove *S. decaocto*, Indian red turtle dove *S. tranquebarica*, Indian spotted dove *S. chinensis* and Indian little brown dove *S. senegalensis*. The four sympatric species of doves were found to differ from one another in choice of habitat, food and feeding place.

#### Habitat Choice

While the ring dove showed preference only for the open grass fields, the red turtle dove preferred both grass and cultivated fields. The spotted dove preferred shady places near cover for feeding and scrub for resting and other maintenance activities. The little brown dove prefers grass fields, areas close to cover, and scrub vegetation. The presence of different species of doves varies during the year. The spotted dove is seen from October to April. The red turtle dove from January to the first week of August. The ring dove population was abundant only during January to April. Only the little brown dove was always present in the study area.

All the four species of doves differed from one another in the use of tree/shrub species. The ring dove was associated with *Eucalyptus* sp., *Grevillea robusta*, *Prosopis juliflora*, *Cordia dichotoma*, *Azadirachta indica* and *Acacia nilotica*. The red turtle dove predominantly used *Melia azedarach*, *Delonix regia*, *Terminalia arjuna*, *Holoptelia integrifolia*, *A. indica*, *C. dichotoma* and *P. juliflora*. The spotted dove used *Tectona grandis*, *C. dichotoma*, *A. indica* and *P. juliflora*. The little brown dove mainly utilized *D. regia*, *T. arjuna*, *G. robusta*, *Morus alba*, *T. grandis*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Eucalyptus* sp., *A. indica*, *C. dichotoma*, *H. integrifolia* and *P. juliflora*.

#### Food Selection

It was found that during winter the food was 'temporarily superabundant' in the form of seeds from monsoon herbs. Summer and monsoon were lean periods. The whole of spotted dove population and bulk of the ring dove population left the area in May. In the first week of August the entire red

turtle dove population moved away from the area. Thus, the four species of doves coexisted in the area only during winter. They were found to select slightly different foods. While the ring dove fed more on *Echinochloa colonum* and *Paspalum flavidum*, the red turtle dove fed more on seeds of *Paspalum distichum* and then on *Echinochloa colonum*. The spotted dove fed more on *P. flavidum* and then on *Setaria verticillata* and *Brachiaria ramosa*. The little brown dove utilised *Panicum antidotale*, *E. colonum*, *Cynodon dactylon* and *B. ramosa*.

#### Choice of Feeding Place

It was seen that the ring dove and the red turtle dove preferred open areas for feeding, while the spotted dove preferred shady places near cover. The little brown dove was not very specific in its choice and fed everywhere, though more in the grass field. Open grass field appears to be favoured by doves. This habitat was dominated by the ring dove (Maximum count = 389) and the red turtle dove (maximum count = 266). The little brown dove fed in a group of 8-20 in the same field at the periphery of the large congregation of the ring and red turtle doves population. The maximum count of the little brown dove was 42 in the grass field during December, i.e. just before the arrival of the ring and red turtle doves. This phenomenon of restriction of foraging zone of a species with the increase in number of competing species has been termed Svardson's hypothesis (Willis 1966) or Compression hypothesis (Wilson 1967).

Thus doves were found to adjust their densities according to the availability of resources (through natural selection) by dispersing when food was scarce and aggregating when the food is abundant.

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## Notes from Madurai - Pelicans, Bee-eaters and Peafowl

KUMARAN SATHASIVAM, 29, Jadamuni Koil Street, Madurai

**B**y the side of the road to the airport from Madurai, just outside the city, is a pond - a tank, I have not been able to find out its name - which is usually an interesting place for watching birds. I was quite unprepared for what I saw there one morning in late February this year. Travelling by bus, I caught a glimpse of what appeared to be huge white ducks dotted all over the surface of the water. The bus went past swiftly, and it took me a moment to realize that such large birds could only be pelicans.

Having never seen pelicans so near Madurai before, and knowing that Nichols' does not list them in his "Occurrence of Birds in Madura District", I went back in the evening to confirm my notion. There was indeed a group of pelicans in the far end, and I counted about 40 of the birds. The species could not be identified due to the distance and the setting sun in my eyes. I suppose it is safe to assume they were spotbilled pelicans.

Two days later, I went back to the pond to get photographs, but disappointingly, there were no pelicans then. It was obvious that they had been disturbed by fishermen who were busy with their nets. The next afternoon too, there were no pelicans though there were no fishermen either. I imagined then that the pelicans had been driven away for ever.

However, in April, I was driving past this place again when I saw painted storks flying above the pond. I had never seen these storks so close to Madurai before, and it had to be investigated. The next morning, when I went there, I saw a splendid sight from the embankment. A group of about 150 pelicans and 50 painted storks was lined up along a distant edge of the pond. Even as I watched, a man was swimming in the water, trying to approach the birds using a clump of water hyacinth leaves as cover. Fortunately, even while he was far away, the birds spotted him and flew off in a group. This was a spectacular sight. Again, I am not sure of the identity of the pelicans. I could only note that the birds were not pure white, more a somewhat dirty brownish white in colour. They appeared to have black trailing edges to their wings too.

I guess that the pond has acquired some significance recently as a source of food for the pelicans. Obviously it supports plenty of fish - this could be readily seen (and smelled!) by the remains of fishes lying on the bank and even on the road (work of brahmny kites, no doubt). Perhaps this has something to do with a change in water use from the tank? Considering that the current status of the spotbilled pelican is said to be far from satisfactory, this small waterbody (which had deep water even in June) may conceivably become important for the species in future.

What was disturbing was that in April and in June, there were a number of dead fish floating in the pond. What was the cause? Overpopulation? Fishing by explosives? Perhaps an inflow of toxic materials? If the last, it would affect the pelicans directly.

### Possible record of Chestnut-headed Bee-eater

Very close to the pelican pond is another pond, which normally has very shallow water. On that day in March when I went looking for pelicans, I had a look there too, and perched on some *Ipomoea* near the bank were a couple of bluetailed bee-eaters and another bee-eater. This third bird was about the size of the bluetailed bee-eaters, but it very clearly had a chestnut head and nape, and a yellow throat and chin. It may have had a short pair of tail pins. I would have diagnosed the bird as a chestnut-headed bee-eater right away, but for the occurrence of the species there being so unexpected.

### White Peafowl

On the 24th June, I saw just outside a village called Kamudakkudi, which is near Paramakudi, on the road to Rameswaram from Madurai, an absolutely white peafowl along with a normal female peafowl. The white bird had no train of feathers. How does one say whether a white trainless peafowl is a female or a moulting male at a casual glance?



## Birding in Baroda City

Dr. J.C. UTTANGI, H.No. 36, Mission Compound, Dharwad 580 001

**B**aroda is not only a great place to birdwatch, but it is also a wonderful place to relax. Quite a few large Banyan trees are still found which provide dense shade in addition to shelter and fruits for many birds. An age old Banyan tree with as many as 100 branches was observed in the very large compound of the Students Hostel in Pratapgunj. This locality about 2 kilometers away east of Baroda Railway Station has lots of greenery around its many concrete buildings and access

roads. The well known 3 storied 'Tulshi Hotel' of Baroda could be seen standing directly opposite to the Students Hostel. During my short visit to Baroda City on 15th and 16th June 1997, I was accommodated in this Tulshi Hotel at Pratapgunj locality. The well preserved vegetation of this locality consisting of garden plants, vines, shrubs, flower and fruit bearing trees and especially the hedge plants and roadside trees attract many different common resident birds such as,



redvented bulbul, tailor bird, ashy prinia, grey tit, magpie robin, pied bush chat, Indian robin, white eye, thickbilled flowerpecker, tickell's flowerpecker, purplerumped sunbird, coppersmith, koel, common myna and crow. Small flocks of rock pigeons, doves and mynas were also seen basking and preening their feathers during morning hours on tops of concrete buildings. Even marsh birds like pond heron, redwattled lapwing including the large pied wagtail showed no hesitancy to settle down to forage in the big lawns of official buildings, busy Guest and Circuit Houses.

I had not yet finished my morning tea on the 15th June when, suddenly my attention was drawn by some squeaking calls emerge out from a nearby compound behind Tulshi Hotel. Looking out through the window of my room from the 2nd Floor, I could see a group of 4 babblers busy searching for food. In the same habitat, a pair of magpie robins had made a nest in the hollow of a mature tree trunk. The male was supplying food to the occupants of the nest by picking up insects from the same compound. What was surprising was the presence of a couple of the little brown doves. At present, this dove is rarely seen in towns and cities. The reason is that it was hostilely treated in the past. The fact that it still occurs here in Baroda City speaks immensely about the degree of respect the people of Gujarath have towards animals and birds.

Another good site to study birds is the Zoo. We were there at about 11 a.m. on the 15th June. At the very entrance gate and a little distance away from it on the right side of the path leading to the much spoken Aviary there were common

babblers *Turdoides caudatus* lurking in the bamboo thickets. A black drongo was seen hawking winged insects and a laggar falcon flew suddenly from a bushy tree in front of us. At my disposal the time was too short to cover the entire Zoo area. However, the opportunity to see and hear the calls of rare birds of different continents brought and kept there in the Aviary was not missed. Though dominated chiefly by parakeets the birds in the Aviary are well nourished and preserved. It offers an excellent opportunity for sound recording of bird calls. Of all the bird calls I could hear on that day, the only call that was really attractive was the soft melo 'krukur-krukur' calls of the dwarfish Australian diamond dove, *Geopelia caneata*. On the lawn of the big Botanical Garden a pair of Indian robins were detected. Across the far eastern end of the Zoo, there exists a Hotel called 'Have More Hotel'. In front of this Hotel around 1.30 p.m., a lone bank myna, *Acridotheres ginginianus*, was seen picking up chana (roasted gram) nuts and other scraps as big as its widest gape could take them. Because of intense heat it was gasping for breath. A two wheeler was kept parked in front of the Hotel, and the bird was attempting to reach the food packets hung on the handle of the vehicle.

Along certain fringe areas of Baroda covering the Palace Grounds, birding can be extremely rewarding. Spotted doves were found freely feeding on road sides. Birds in Baroda on the whole seem to be tame and friendly. Sometimes they come so close and that even a pedestrian can pat on the back a feeding bank myna. They even to pause so as to enable birders to complete their observations.



## Nest of Goggle Eyed Plover or Stone Curlew In The Calicut University Campus In Kerala

N J GEORGE, Asst. Curator, Dept. of Zoology, University of Calicut, Calicut University P.O., Kerala 673 635

The goggle eyed plover or stone curlew *Burhinus oedichnemus* had not been recorded nesting in Kerala. Neither Ali (1969) nor Neelankantan (1986) mention its nesting in Kerala. Sasikumar (1993), had also not reported the nesting of this bird in Kerala. Ferguson (JBNHS 16:6) refers to its breeding in August.

During a study of the birds of the Calicut University campus, I found this bird occurring in small numbers. This species affects open, sloping laterite-dominated country with scanty scrub. Cashew and Calicopterys are the common plants of this area.

The plover was regularly seen in the Botanical Garden and the backyard of the Instrumentation Centre of the University during June to February from 1984 onwards.

On 27-03-1995 at about 8.00 a.m. I saw one stone curlew abruptly standing and briskly walking away from a sloping laterite area strewn with pebbles and stones behind the language block of the Univeristy. Close examination of this spot led to the discovery of a nest of this plover with two eggs.

The nest site was about 3 furlongs north-west of the spot where these birds were regularly seen earlier.

One of the birds incubated the eggs and the other remained vigilant and watchful in the vicinity of the nest. Whenever I approached the nest, the watching bird voiced warning calls and the incubating bird abruptly stood up and swiftly ran in short spurts holding its wings in horizontal position with extended neck till it could sneak away to a nearby cover.

At a distance of about 20 feet from the nest of the stone curlew, a pair of redwattled lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) were nesting. There was no conflict between the stone curlew and the lapwing. On three occasions, the eggs were unattended by any of the stone curlew pair.

### The Nest, Egg and Incubation

The nest was in a depression on dry open stony country 3 feet distant from a Cashew sapling. The eggs were surrounded by 2 to 3 large pieces of laterite stones, pebbles and bits of

dried cowdung and bits of molluscan shells. While incubating, the bird sat over the eggs fitting well into the depression.

The two eggs were pale buff in colour and boldly blotched with purplish brown in a remarkably oblitative pattern and it was difficult to find the nest. Of the two eggs, one appeared to be slightly larger than the other.

The 'small egg' weighed 26.5 g., measured 5.3 cm. x 3.6 cm. and the 'larger' one 27.5 g., measured 5.1 cm. x 3.6 cm.

On 12th April, 1995, I noticed holes on the two eggs and found ants (*Camponotus* sp.) feeding on the fluid of the egg. The ants were probably feeding on the remaining drops of albumen (egg white-fluid) oozing out of the egg through the holes and the holes on the eggs were perhaps made by the egg-tooth of the hatching chicks prior to breaking out of the shell.

Later the young left the nest with their parents.



## Let's Make Good use of our Birding Lists!

AASHEESH PITTIE, *Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh, P.O. Box # 45, Banjara Hills Post Office, Hyderabad 500 034*

The pleasure that is derived by most of us from watching birds, is a good enough reason to indulge our hobby. However, our jottings on field trips, in the form of Lists, keep accumulating over the years and are generally not used in any further analysis or study. How many among us use our data to write up papers for scientific publications - like *ornithologists*? How many of us have data beyond a quickly scribbled "redvented bulbul - nesting!?" Such notes will never be sufficient for a robust scientific paper. Yet we enjoy birding and keep notes of our observations. Our joy of birdwatching could be extended if we contributed our abbreviated or telegraphic notes to an organization for compilation and analysis. If these data which are collected by *amateur* ornithologists or birdwatchers throughout India were to be compiled regularly in a format which is both concise and clear, they will, over a period of time, result in a lot of useful information which will be available for further analysis.

The Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh (BSAP), publishes a column called *Birding Notes* in its monthly bulletin. Pitta, which contains this type of data from Andhra Pradesh. Members' notes are printed in a *telegraphic* format, retaining only important and outstanding aspects of their observations. Eligible notes include : breeding records, uncommon sightings and behaviour, migratory birds arrival and departure dates, local migration, heronries, roosts, etc. Information is printed in a format of State / District / Site / Species. State and District are arranged alphabetically, species systematically under each District with sites following species. Abbreviations used in the text are appended at the end. Contributor's initials appear at the end of each published record and a footnote to the column contains the full credits.

Initially, notes will be published from the 4 southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Depending upon the over-all response, the scope of this project will be further extended to cover all the other Indian states. Participants will have to send the following information for each observation.

1. State, District, Place, Coordinates (if possible) from where observation is reported.

2. Date of observation or period e.g. 1-10/7/1997.
3. English and scientific name of bird species and other pertinent species (plants, insects, etc.) mentioned.
4. Qualifying statements for observations such as 'breeding,' etc., like "Nest (N) was seen," "Bird carrying fecal-sac/food/nesting material in bill," "Birds seen copulating/singing/displaying," etc.
5. Any related phenomena pertinent to the observation e.g. flowering/fruitlet of trees and shrubs, sudden filling-up of waterbodies, etc.
6. Name, address, phone numbers, etc., of observer.
7. A type-written/computer printout is preferable. Otherwise a neat and legible note is requested.

What could be the advantages and outcome of such an exercise? At the outset, let us realize that though a lot of bird study has been done in India, we still do not have enough basic information about the varied tapestry of our bird life. All effort will be made to scrutinize each and every record before publication with the assistance of honorary referees from each state and of course, the active cooperation of the observer. As mentioned earlier, this project will squeeze a great deal of information into its concise format. Information regarding distribution of birds, their breeding periods, their migratory habits, their feeding habits, etc., which information is still quite incomplete for India, will begin to accumulate every month. As this data will be computerized, various types of studies and interpretations can be made with ease. This data can be made available to researchers as and when they require it for a nominal charge. An annual publication could be brought out with analysis of the past year's data as a reference book along with addresses of the participants and other interesting and related information.

It should be noted that while information sent to us for this column will be certainly published if found appropriate, contributors will receive a free copy, only of the first *Pitta* containing their notes. Thereafter, even though they send



notes (which are published), they will have to become a member of the BSAP to receive further copies of *Pitta*. Only members of the BSAP will receive free copies of *Pitta*. Members of this Society receive the following publications in a year - 2 issues of *Mayura* (newsletter) and 12 issues of *Pitta* (bulletin). For membership details please write to the above address.

An example of what is planned is shown below. If you have any doubts / clarifications or suggestions, please feel free to write to me. But do send in your observations promptly and regularly, every month and, make this effort a success!

This column publishes notes from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala & Tamil Nadu on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. These will be printed in brief, telegraphic form. English names follow Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds* (1996, 12th ed.); classification, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996).

#### HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Stone curlew 4/7 Banjara Hills, Hyd. City; 1 N with 2 eggs, under hedge. 6/7 N abandoned when nearby tree was blown over in storm. (CTH).

Pied crested cuckoo 27/6-7/7 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city; seen and heard often. (SAT).

Crow pheasant 1-10/7 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city; Heard often (SAT).

Spotted owl 21-22/7 Gunrock Enclave, Secunderabad; A pair nesting in a tamarind tree. (SAT).

Nightjars (sp.?) 2-3/7 KBR National Park, Hyd. city; Sitting on trails at 0430-0515 hours (SAT).

Black drongo 20/7 Jubilee Hills, Hyd. city; A pair N in *Terminalia* sp., vigorously defending N from marauding house crows. (CTH).

Tree pie 1-10/7 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city; Seen and heard often. (SAT).

Purplerumped Sunbird 11/7 Banjara Hills, Hyd. city; A nest hanging from Bougainvillea bush. Pair in attendance. (SAT).

Baya weaver bird 20/7 Jubilee Hills, Hyd. city; Nest over a well. (CTH).

Flowering plants: Rusty Shield-bearer, Tamarind, Jacaranda, Lantana (SAT); Teak, Laburnum, (AP).

#### MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru;



Redheaded merlin 16/7 Stopped at a Green Sandpiper, but was thwarted by a pair of redwattled lapwings. (SQ).

Indian bluebreasted banded rail 23/7 1 bird in rice paddies. (SQ).

Brown crane 16/7 1 in rice paddies. (SQ).

Greenshank 16/7 2 birds in rice paddies. (SQ).

Green sandpiper 16/7 15-20 in rice paddies (SQ).

Red turtle dove 16/7 in song. (SQ).

House crow 21/6 A congress of crows feeding on remains of grey heron chick which must have fallen out of a nest in the palmyra palms (SAT).

White browed bulbul 16/7 in chattering song. (SQ).

Red munia 16/7 Flock of 80 birds. M in intermediate, mottled red, plumage. (SQ).

#### NALGONDA DISTRICT

Dindi reservoir 5/7; Openbill stork c. 100; greater flamingo c. 300; terns (sp.?): pied kingfisher. (CTH).

#### RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Purple heron 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ.; 1 bird, (JVDM).

Whitebacked vulture, 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. (JVDM).

Short-toed eagle 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. (JVDM).

Grey partridge 27/7 Chilkur Deer Park. (SAT).

Pied crested cuckoo 27/7 Chilkur Deer Park. A pair. (SAT).

Common hawk cuckoo 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. (JVDM).

Golden oriole 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ, (JVDM).

House crow 20/7 Tondpalli Village, Shamshabad Mandal; 1 imm., bird on ground. (AP).

Yelloweyed babbler 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. (JVDM).

Jungle babbler 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ.; (JVDM).

Booted warbler 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. Unconfirmed. (JVDM).

Baya weaver bird 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. : Nesting (JVDM).

Whitethroated munia 13/7 Hyd. Central Univ. : Nesting (JVDM).

Fruiting plants : 27/7 Chilkur Deer Park; Zizyphus xylopyra, Randia dumetorum.

Abbreviations : Hyd. = Hyderabad; imm. = immature; KBR = Kasu Brahmananda Reddy; M = male; Univ. = University.

Contributions : A. Pittie (AP), C. T. Hash (CTH), J.V.D. Moorthy (JVDM), S.A. Taher (SAT), S. Quader (SQ).

### CORRESPONDANCE

**GOOSANDER *Mergus merganser*, AN ADDITION TO THE BIRDLIFE OF DEEPAR BEEL WILDLIFE SANCTUARY OF ASSAM.** RATHIN BARMAN and P.C. BHATTACHARJEE, Animal Ecology and Wildlife Biology Lab. Department of Zoology, Gauhati University 781 014, Assam

Deepar Beel (26° 03' 26" N to 26° 09' 26" N; and 90° 36' 39" E to 90° 41' 25" E) is the richest wetland from the avifaunal point of view in lower Assam. This wetland is one of the "National Wetlands of India" and recognised as an

"Internationally important Wetland" by the IWRB. From the last ten years the Animal Ecology and Wildlife Biology Lab. of Gauhati University is regularly monitoring this wetland.

On 26th November, 1995, during a regular visit to the wetland, we sighted three goosanders *Mergus merganser* in the core water body of the wetland (i.e. the Sanctuary area of the wetland having an area of 4.14 sq. kms.) along with about five hundred gadwal, two hundred plus spotbilled duck and two thousand plus common teal. The three goosanders were quite clear from a distance of about hundred meters with their beautiful plumage. Using our binoculars we got a clear view of one male and two female goosanders.

The three birds were seen first within the gadwal flock. After some time the goosanders flew to about 50 meters from the first place and then join another group of spotbilled duck. The very next day we went to the place and this time we saw the birds within a mixed flock of gadwal and common teal.

This is the first record of goosander in Deepar Beel since the regular monitoring was started in 1987. Usually goosanders winter in only some restricted fast flowing rivers of the state, and this is a very rare case as this bird wintering in a lentic wetland having a high amount of anthropogenic pressure on it.



**NESTING SITE OF WHITE-EYED BUZZARD IN KANHA NATIONAL PARK.** RAVISHANKER KANOJE, Forest Ranger, Kanha Tiger Reserve, Post Mukki, District : Balaghat (M.P.) 481 111

On 12th May 1996, I was watching birds in the Bhaishanghat hills (22°11' N and 80°43'E) on the State Highway No. 26 near Mukki in the Kanha National Park. I located a nest similar to the nest of a crow in the fork of a leafless saja tree *Terminalia tomentosa*. I observed the nest through 7 x 50 binoculars from the uphill side. The white-eyed buzzard *Butastur tessa* was incubating the eggs.

Saja is a deciduous tree that sheds leaves in February and March. The leaves are renewed in June (Witt. 1916). The White-eyed buzzard nests in February to May in the fork of a thickly foliated tree such as mango *Mangifera indica* preferably one in a grove (Ali 1979). The breeding season of the white-eyed buzzard coincides with the leaf shedding of a saja tree. The nesting of a white-eyed buzzard in a leafless saja tree is worth recording.

#### References

- Ali, S. (1979) : The book of Indian birds, Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay.
- Witt, D.O. (1916) : Descriptive list of trees, shrubs, climbers and economic herbs of the Northern and Berar Forest Circle, Central Provinces, Jugal Kishore & Co., Dehradun.



**AGGRESSIVE DISPLAY OF A MALE PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD AGAINST A MIRROR, KARAMBAKKUDI, PUDUKKOTTAI.** A. PRABHAKAR, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History, Kalampalayam, Coimbatore 641 010

Aggressive behaviour is common in birds during the breeding season. Birds displaying aggressive behaviour while seeing their own image in a mirror is a rare sighting, especially for sunbirds. On 20th July 96 a male purplerumped sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* displaying aggressively against its own image was observed. As this behaviour occurred during the second breeding, it supports Ali & Ripley's (1987) suggestion

that aggressive display in sunbirds occurs more frequently during this time. I saw the bird at 0631 hrs excitedly pecking at the mirror and making a sharp twittering sound. The female bird was looking on from outside. Interestingly the time spent on fighting increased whenever the female was close by.

There is a sunbird nest located just above the mirror on a hanging electric wire, probably constructed by this pair of birds. This kind of display by males results in attracting females and enhances the female's mating potentiality. This also safeguards its mate from other males.

#### Reference

- Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. (1987). Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, Oxford University Press, Delhi.



**CURRENT STATUS OF THE MASKED FINFOOT IN INDIA.** DR. ANWARUDDIN CHOUDHURY, The Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India, C/o. The Assam Co. Ltd., Girish Bordoloi Path, Bamunimaidam, Guwahati 781 021

The masked finfoot *Heliopais personata* (G.R.Gray) is a rare bird all over its range from north-eastern India to Malaya and Sumatra. It is a bird of wetlands inside the rain forests preferring similar habitat as affected by the white-winged wood duck *Cairina scutulata*. Shy and secretive, the finfoot is difficult to observe and so any sight record is extremely important.

In India, it was known to occur as a resident species in eastern Assam, Manipur and adjacent areas (Ali & Ripley : HANDBOOK). There are only three specimens from within Indian limits in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society (Abdulali: CATALOGUE BNHS). These were from the Tingrai river (2 specimens; the river is partly in Tinsukia and partly in Dibrugarh districts of eastern Assam) and from Moran (1 specimen; in Dibrugarh district). All these records are very old and recent reports of occurrence are virtually non-existent and its status unknown.

During wildlife surveys in different parts of north-eastern India since mid 1980s, I looked around for the bird all over the area, from Innerline RF (RF = Reserved Forest) of Hailakandi and Cachar to Dhansiri RF of Karbi Anglong and the rain forests of eastern Assam. But the bird remained elusive suggesting its extreme rarity at present. In Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts of eastern Assam, where the past collection sites are located, some good habitat is still found. However, the old sites, i.e., the Tingrai river and Moran are no longer suitable for the bird, as the river bank is now mostly inhabited or under tea plantation, Moran has become a growing township.

Although some of the best and last remaining patches of rain forest in Assam are left in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts, I could not observe a single bird during a two-year long survey (1992-94). Many local villagers and Forest staff are not aware of any such bird although they are familiar with the white-winged wood duck. Only three sighting records were reported, all from the rain forest biotope of Tinsukia district. These reports are presented chronologically.



c. 1988: One seen in Dum Duma river inside Dum Duma RF (S. Kalita, Forest staff, pers. comn.).

1990-91: One seen in a small waterbody near Dhekiajan forest Village inside Upper Dihing (East block) RF (Robin Sonowal, staff of Oil India Ltd., pers. comn.).

1992: One seen some time in August-September in the Dibru river near Nazirating, just outside the boundaries of the Kakojan and the Upper Dihing (East block) RFs (T. Moran, pers. comn.).

All these persons could identify the bird from illustrations and also could describe it accurately including its conspicuous bill. All the recorded areas were inside or near tropical rain forest and are some of the last remaining potential habitats.

Outside Assam, I could not get any clue of its recent sighting from anywhere in eastern Arunachal Pradesh or Manipur.

It appears that the masked finfoot has become extremely rare and is much more scarcer than the white-winged wood duck in India. It is still possible that a small and scattered populations still survive in eastern Assam, eastern Arunachal Pradesh and in parts of Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram but is unlikely to be a viable one. Among the potential habitats within protected areas, Namdapha National Park, Kamlang Wildlife Sanctuary (both in Arunachal Pradesh), Intanki (Nagaland) and Yangoupokpi-Lockchao (Manipur) are worth a detailed survey.



**LITTLE GREEN HERON *Butorides striatus* AND WHITE EARED BULBUL *Pycnonotus leucogenys* SIGHTED IN SOUTHERN RAJASTHAN.** RAZA H TEHSIN, 106, Panchwati, Udaipur 313 001

Panarwa is a village situated about 100 km south-west of Udaipur in Rajasthan. The Arravali Hills surround this village with an extensive forest area; one of the densest and largest forest tracks of Rajasthan. The main river in this forest is Vakal. Deep shady pools of water remain all through the year at many places. The river course is strewn with boulders and the banks have dense vegetation. The area has been declared a Wildlife Sanctuary called "Pholwari-ki-Naal".

On 19th April, 1997 at about 17.30 h. in deep shade near a pool, I sighted a heron. At first it appeared to be a pond heron except for its coloration, which was dark green. I started to note down its characteristics carefully and asked my daughter, Arefa, to fetch 'The Handbook' from our car. On comparing its features with those given in the book, I found it to be little green heron *Butorides striatus*.

Again on 20th morning, at about 08.00 h., I sighted a bird on a tree, which resembled a red vented bulbul but with prominent white ear-patches. On comparing its features with those in 'The Handbook', I found it to be white eared bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*.

These two birds are sighted in Southern Rajasthan perhaps for the first time.



**WHITE JUNGLE CROW.** ADBULLA E.V., H.S.S.T. Zoology, Higher Secondary School, Perambra 673 525, Kozhikode Dist.

I sighted a flock of jungle crows *Corvus macrorhynchos* on a Tamarind tree *Tamarindus indicus*. The flock consisted of about 10 crows and of these, a few were sitting on the branch and the rest underneath the tree. I was surprised to see a white crow in the flock on the tree. Its size was similar to the black ones. The plumage was entirely white without a single black spot. The beak and legs were pinkish. Altogether the albino appeared to be a beautiful crow.

I noticed that the albino had a friendly relationship with the other members of the flock since the majority 'Black' had not made any attempt to disturb the 'White' member of the flock. No apartheid was observed.



**SOUTH INDIAN GREY-BACKED SHRIKE *Lanius schach caniceps*.** V. GURUSWAMI, 67, Ramamurthy Colony, Chennai - 600 082

On 29.12.96 around 9.00 a.m. a shrike was sighted in the Woodland habitat of the Simpson Estate, Sembium, Chennai. It was carefully observed for 35 minutes through 10 power Binoculars.

The bird was about the size of the rufous-backed shrike *Lanius schach erythronotus*.

The entire back was light grey without any tinge of rufous. The grey extended right upto the rump which was rufous.

Size and colour point to its identity - South Indian grey-backed shrike.

The bay-backed shrike, a much smaller bird is occasionally seen in the Woodland areas of the Estate during winter. I believe the rufous-backed shrike has not been reported in the city and its surroundings.

Could any reader of Newsletter for Bird Watchers help with information about the status of the grey-backed shrike in the City?



**ATTACK BY CROWS ON RAIN QUAILS.** BHARATH SINGH, Bhim Niwas, Gumanpura, Kota 324 007

While I was on a visit to Sorsan, the great Indian bustard closed area in Baran District in south-east Rajasthan, I observed pairs of house crows *Corvus splendens* hunting in unison. They were flying in the open undulating grasslands interspersed with Jujube bushes. On finding a quail one of the pair would attack it by diving at it, and as is the wont with quails, they would fly a short distance and descend suddenly into a bush. Then the partner or the attacker, whichever happened to be nearer, would calmly walk to the bush, poke its bill inside and pick the quail as if caught in a pair of tongs. The prey was not shared by the partners. In most cases the possessor would fly a long distance before settling for a feast.

In a small area of about 100 x 100 meters three pairs were actively predating on quails by concerted effort. The quails were identified as rain quails *Coturnix coromandelica*, which gather in large numbers during the monsoon months in this area. Initially I took it to be an isolated predatory incidence but this year I saw the same phenomenon of concerted hunting in the same area, thereby confirming the fact that a certain population of house crows of this area has learnt the quail's behaviour, and the possibility of hunting quails by a combined operation.



**OCCURRENCE OF THE LONGBILLED RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius placidus* IN ANDHRA PRADESH.** NAGULU, V., VASUDEVA RAO, V. and SRINIVASULU, C., *Wildlife Biology Section, Department of Zoology, Osmania University, Hyderabad 500 007*

On 6th of December 1995, while on one of our regular trips to Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh, we came across a flock of 32 little ringed plovers *Charadrius dubius* busily feeding on a mudflat near Kandikuppam. Our attention was drawn towards a small flock of 6 birds which landed nearby. At first, we thought the newly arrived birds were little ringed plovers, but on close observation we found that the new arrivals had longer, slender legs and bill when compared to that of little ringed plovers and were relatively larger. The thick white streaks over the ear coverts and a quick glance at the Pictorial Guide by Ali and Ripley (1983) confirmed that the newly arrived birds were longbilled ringed plovers. We have not come across any reference to the occurrence of this bird in Andhra Pradesh. The Checklist of Andhra Pradesh (Taher and Pittie, 1989) too does not include this species.

This is probably the first report of the occurrence of longbilled ringed plovers *Charadrius placidus* from Andhra Pradesh. However, our recent publication (Vasudeva Rao, et al., 1996) includes *Charadrius placidus* in its list from the same locality, the new record has not been published separately.

#### Acknowledgements

We thank Prof. J.V. Ramana Rao and Dr. B.M. Parasharya for their assistance.

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**THE JOYS OF BIRDWATCHING.** PRAGATI NAYAK, Aashirwad, Sampe, P.O. Aryapu, Puttur 574 210

I like to observe the birds around me and I feel thrilled to see them in their natural surroundings. In fact, early morning walks in the cool fresh air are part of the pleasure of bird-watching and as far as I am concerned, I don't worry about species and sub-species and dates and times. I enjoy walking and I enjoy watching birds. I don't mind if I can't identify any bird exactly. It is just thrilling to see a beautiful creature in the wild.

Mr Asad Rahmani has also mentioned that my observation of a woodpecker going into one hole and coming out of the other could be very important. I hope Mr Rahmani knows that an areca tree is very narrow, about 8 cms in diameter and the holes I mentioned were only 20-25 cms apart. I hope I haven't misled him into believing that the woodpecker built a tunnel into the tree and went into one end and appeared at the other several metres away?

Another thing I would like to discuss is the locations of Puttur and of Kihim. Puttur is quite far from Mysore (200 kms) and I wonder why you head all my writings "Mysore". Puttur is located 50 kms away from the port town of Mangalore in Dakshina Kannada dist. of Karnataka. I live 2 kms outside Puttur in the small village of Aryapu.



**HOUSE CROWS ATTACK KINGFISHER.** V.K. PARALKAR, B-2/3, Manav Kalyan Soc., Bangur Nagar, Goregaon (W), Mumbai 400 090

While watching waders at Bangur Nagar near Goregaon (Mumbai) I saw a small blue kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* which had just caught a fish being chased by three crows. The kingfisher managed to elude the pursuers by flying into a mangrove bush.



**JAPANESE CORMORANTS IN BHARATPUR.** KAUSHIK DEUTI, 39-A, Govinda Auddy Road, Block-A, Flat No. 3/1, Calcutta 700 027

Thanks for publishing my note on the status of darter and comb duck in West Bengal in the Correspondence Section of the Newsletter (Vol. 37, No. 4). Referring to the photo of the large cormorants from Bharatpur by R.G. Soni published on the back cover of the same issue, I would like to point out that these are not large cormorants but Japanese cormorants or Temminck's cormorants (*Phalacrocorax capillatus*). From the Field-guide to the Waterbirds of Asia by Bharat Bhushan et al., I learn that they are of almost the same size (length 92 cms as against 90 cms for large cormorants) and have "large white area behind eyes, often extends to almost back of head". During breeding there are "white feathers on rear crown and many small black spots develop in white area behind eye" (the latter clearly visible in the published photograph).

The Japanese cormorant breeds on sea coasts of East Asia but during migration is occasionally seen on inland lakes and marshes. Probably, some have migrated to South Asia also and this is the first record from this region as well as for Bharatpur.

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Cover : **Indian Roller** (*Coracias benghalensis*) belongs to the *Coraciidae* family, comprising of stout birds with big head, and long broad wings. The name comes from the acrobatic courtship display of the male; tumbling in the air, while trying to attract the attention of a female.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS